

Oral History and the War: The View from Papua New Guinea

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In this paper, prepared as the keynote address to the conference Cultural Encounters in the Pacific War, I wish to comment on some of the events of World War II in my country, Papua New Guinea, and to use that commentary to address more general questions pertaining to the uses of oral and documentary history in the representation of the past. I begin by drawing a parallel between the study of colonial history in Papua New Guinea and the place of peasant history in European historiography. The paper then reviews a range of Papua New Guinean experiences during the war, as seen through the lens of oral history, before concluding with further remarks about problems of historical method.

Colonial History and Oral Traditions

The attitude taken to history, especially colonial history, by Europeans stems from some of the same ideological positions taken in regard to documents of the European literate classes and the oral traditions of the peasants in continental Europe. The development of European historiography in the study of folklore makes it plain that many European historians, with very few exceptions, had built up a considerable indifference toward the oral traditions of the peasants. During the nineteenth century in particular, professional historians concentrated on documents, while folklorists studied contemporary oral testimonies. Both concluded that oral traditions were not of much use for historical purposes. These scholars were members of the ruling class, which included politicians, lawyers, and doctors. According to them history meant what happened in the activities and events that had to do with the people in power whose views and ideas were recorded in documents. Unlike the upper class the peasants did not have power and they could not make decisions. The masses did not affect the flow of history because they had no control over what happened. They could not make history. Only the elite made decisions and thereby contributed to history. For this reason many professional historians were more concerned with the records left behind by the leaders and the institutions they had created than with the oral histories of the peasants.

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The folkloric study of peasant oral traditions did not locate events that appeared in documents researched by professional historians. These professionals concluded that oral traditions were useless. Amateur historians did not challenge this conclusion because they took oral testimony at face value, diminishing it because their work was not taken seriously. Historians, both professional and amateur, and folklorists were asking the wrong questions. Even though oral traditions could not be related to events as described in the documents, oral histories at least indicated peasant attitudes toward events and the actions of the elite.

The general intellectual climate among highly respected scholars in continental Europe questioned the validity of oral traditions as historical sources. And this indifference toward and bias against the oral cultures of the Western peasantry was to have a profound impact on European historians and anthropologists who went out from their respective countries to study cultures other than their own. Why should they trust oral narratives of non-Western peoples?

In Papua New Guinea the damage to oral history has not been as great as elsewhere; but what of the future? We may have escaped the work of amateur historians because professionals have taken the lead in studying Melanesian oral traditions seriously. I am a participant in events while wanting to record them as accurately as I can. This includes recording people's knowledge of the recent past, including the events of World War II. Indeed, my interest in recording it grows stronger as changes among the Binandere erode knowledge of their past in many parts of the community. In this way, my research and writing is making me a major custodian of my people's traditions.

Of course, in the role of custodian lies a real danger of augmenting live oral tradition with one person's viewpoint, however loyal and careful that one person may be. Live testimony depends in part on a lack of literacy for its continued existence. Literate historians often play at keeping their written documents alive but immutable by insuring that they are not easily acquired by informants, frequently people who have only recently become literate and who have too much respect for the written word. The ability or the right to criticize the written word is not established easily in oral societies once they come into contact with literate foreigners. It takes a long time for these societies to realize that the written word is no stronger than its spoken counterpart and can be just as wrong.

The essence of live oral tradition is, I think, that there is no one "carrier" above all others. In most Melanesian societies, there are no specialists designated as carriers of traditions and directly responsible to the chief or king, to members of a higher class, or even to the state. The transmission forms and contents of another kind of oral tradition are supervised, guarded,

and controlled by someone higher than the carriers themselves. That is why formal oral traditions in highly structured or graded societies, such as found in Polynesia, are not necessarily alive but bend toward the yoke of a ruler so that a specialist is the custodian of the chief's, king's, or state's tradition. Similar situations existed in continental Europe where historians and folklorists were under the influence of the state. There was not a living oral tradition because once a ruler succeeds to the throne or chieftainship, his order of generations becomes established as the live one.

In my view, the live spoken word in most parts of the Pacific and in Papua New Guinea is not controlled by one person or one carrier above all others. However, once the tradition is contained and shaped by one vessel, it is open to corruption. In short, being an active member of a community and at the same time an objective recorder of tradition is a very difficult dual role. I try to look carefully and honestly at the relations between myself and the society I am writing about and serve. I believe that any person who enters a community and writes about it must meet this double role seriously. The conflict is between writing for the people and writing for the university establishment. I have tried to ensure in my own case that the two are balanced as evenly as possible.

World War II Encounters

I wish now to deal directly with the Papua New Guinea encounter with the Japanese, Australians, and Americans during World War II. In order to appreciate the encounters in Papua New Guinea we look at three groups of people: ordinary villagers; laborers and carriers; and soldiers and police.

In 1939, when the war broke out in Europe, it was too remote for Papua New Guinea. Sir John Guise wrote:

I still remember the night of September 3, 1939, when there were a large group of Papuans including myself sitting beside a radio set belonging to another Papuan at Samarai. We listened with wonder, silence, and fear as Mr. Chamberlain declared war on Germany from London. We tried to make ourselves believe that the broadcast would not affect us at all in Papua but the feeling we had at the time was one of uneasiness. We were brought to the point where we had to recognize and accommodate our thoughts to the implications of this international broadcast from London. There was no other way. (1969, 562)

By August 1941, the European residents' propaganda against the Japanese had become widespread. The *Papuan Villager*, a monthly paper for Europeans and the few Papuans who could read English, had indicated dislike

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of the Japanese. By October the prejudice spilled over, as this quotation shows:

The Japanese are not white men. Their skins have a rather yellow color, sometimes pale brown. They are often small men, but well-made and strong. One strange thing about them is the way their eyes slant upwards at, slant upwards on the outer corners.

In the early days, the Japanese soldiers were bow and arrow men like so many Papuans. But now they have warships, and cannons, and tanks, and airplanes. Perhaps this is a mistake as I do not think their warships and other fighting things are really as good as those of Europeans. And if they ever go to war against the Europeans they will soon find this out.

(Inglis 1969, 508)

At the beginning of 1942 Papua and New Guinea remained a quiet colonial backwater. Despite war in Europe and the determined southward expansion of the Japanese, Europeans continued to live in Port Moresby, Rabaul, and on their plantations as if nothing was happening in the outside world. Most Papua New Guineans were not aware of the great war raging to their north. Some slight fortification and preparation for war had been made in Papua, but the League of Nations mandate forbade the construction of fortification in New Guinea.

On 4 January 1942 peace ended when the Japanese bombed Rabaul. This was their first attack on the Australian territory. Until 1945 the islands of Papua New Guinea became a battlefield over which 1 million Americans, 300,000 Japanese, and nearly 500,000 Australians fought. At the time this was almost one foreigner for every Papua New Guinean. Between 3 and 5 February 1942 the Japanese dropped two bombs on Port Moresby in the early hours of the morning. Numerous stores were hit. The Australian troops and the local people alike began to loot the stores. One eyewitness noted, "Looted Moresby was a blood-chilling example of how thin the veneer of white civilization is in times of great stress and danger." Chaos reigned in Moresby, Samarai, and Misima where the civil administration lost control. The Commonwealth of Australia suspended civilian authority and declared military control in both Papua and New Guinea. The whites suddenly deserted Papua New Guineans. The desertion damaged beyond repair the white prestige that had been established and jealously guarded by the European residents before January 1942. Peter Ryan (1969) put it aptly: "The pre-war relationships of white master and black servants were shaken. A different sort of white man was seen for the first time in the Australian soldiers whose humanity, informality, and willingness to labor in the sun and in the mud were in contrast to the rigid allowances of many of the pre-war residents."

What about the villagers? An obvious effect of the war was the great damage done in areas where the fighting was heaviest. Practically everything Europeans had built before the war was destroyed. Almost all the solid buildings erected by the Germans disappeared. Government and mission stations were destroyed and valuable government and mission records dealing with the period before 1942 were lost. Allied bombing, ground fighting, the Japanese search for food, and, to a lesser extent, some looting by Allied and Japanese soldiers caused most of this destruction. Much Papua New Guinea property was also destroyed. Villages were burned and the people evacuated. Gardens were pillaged and left to the jungle. In the Madang area Allied bombing destroyed the great sea-going canoes of the people of the coast; and, because the old people with the skills to build them also died during the war, the destroyed canoes could not be replaced.

People also suffered from the recruitment of the young men to work for the Japanese or the Allies. As a result gardens in the village were neglected. In some areas Papua New Guineans were shot by the Japanese, or the Allies, for disloyalty. Toward the end of the war hungry Japanese soldiers sometimes shot villagers and enemy prisoners for food. The ordinary people in the villages were deprived and lost their homes. First, the news and the terror of the fight made them move into their hunting grounds, caves, and swamps in the nearby forests. The people left their villages in fear of both the Japanese and the European soldiers. A villager near Finschhafen had this to say: "How could we settle down to clear the bush and make gardens? We were always running away from the Japanese. When we were hiding, the Japanese caught up with us so we had to move on. We collected wild yams and fruits of all kinds in the bush and ate them to keep ourselves alive." Temporary absences from villages for hunting wild animals and collecting sago were a customary practice; the difference now was the length of the absence. Before the war it was a matter of days and weeks; during the war it was longer--in fact, one to three years. Second, in areas which the Allies and the Japanese soldiers used as battlefields, people were forced to evacuate their villages and flee to temporary camps. After the fighting ceased these people were allowed to return to their villages.

One of the bloodiest battles fought during World War II was on the Kokoda trail. The Japanese attempt to capture Australia was diverted in May 1942, after the battle of the Coral Sea. In July the Japanese aimed to occupy Port Moresby by first landing their forces between Gona and Buna in the northern province. Arthur Duna was an ordinary villager who witnessed the invasion and described it:

The firing of the guns and the explosions of bombs brought all the clouds of the skies down and touched the earth and all the living things seemed to be

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crushed to dust. All the clansmen who were brave, courageous, and strong in the previous day appeared to become like babies in their first day out of their mother's womb at the arrival of the Japanese. It was as if the landing, gun noises, and the actual terrifying sight of the ships that covered the wide horizon of the bay had removed the bones of the people. They could not run even if they tried to, for it was a unique disaster beyond anyone's memory.

(In Waiko 1988, 46)

Arthur Duna, a young and daring man, would have been the first person to brandish a stone club or a steel axe in the air if a neighboring clan had invaded his village. But a Japanese invasion was physically and technologically beyond comparison. Clubs and axes were obviously inferior. Guns, bombs, ships, and planes were so superior that the landing, with its thunder of bombing, was like the lightning that strikes the tops of coconut trees. Arthur Duna describes vividly how women, men, and children felt the impact of the nerve-racking attack and the suddenness of the sweeping thrust of the Japanese invasion:

As if you had a dreamlike spirit chasing you and you want to run, [but] you cannot run and the spirit catches you. It went just like that. There was a great panic. That afternoon, you could not run away from where you were at the time of the invasion. There was not time to go to your village to gather your family or collect your valuable belongings. Wife ran naked without her husband and children. Husband ran naked without his wife and children. A child ran without his parents. And even if he or she who was with his small ones, he or she deserted them. All ran in different directions into the bush. Some ran for cover like rats and bandicoots in the kunai grass. The night fell and each individual slept either in the grass or under the trees. The damp soil was your bed and the rotten logs your pillow. You went to sleep wherever you happened to run that night. (In Waiko 1988, 45)

These quotations hardly exaggerate. And in the districts where the war was fought, the Japanese did not try to establish a system of native administration at all. They only moved along like army worms and ravaged the countryside about two miles on either side of the tracks. In one area of Morobe province, a man said of the Japanese behavior, "The Japanese finished the food in the gardens. They finished all our cattle. Defecating and urinating, they spoiled the church. Calling out, '*buta, buta*', or 'pig, pig', they killed and ate our pigs."

How about the Melanesian laborers? By May 1942, as part of the war effort, a standing order was issued that not more than 25 percent of the adult male population of a village could be recruited for laborers and carriers, and that the laborers were to be employed in their home districts (Ryan 1969). On

paper the conditions of indentured laborers were as follows. A minimum wage of 5 shillings per month, and 6 shillings per month for those who rendered a three-year contract of service. The maximum monthly wage was 10 shillings, and 8 shillings was paid to the three-year contract laborers who carried out heavy duties. The plantation laborers were paid only 6 shillings a month as the work was relatively lighter.

In reality, however, the carriers' ability to endure hardships was pushed to the limit. A so-called line of communication between Gona and Buna on the coast through Kokoda across the Owen Stanley Range to Port Moresby on the other side of Papua New Guinea consisted of a series of camps. Each camp had a store, a rest house, and a guard house. The role of carriers was fivefold: to establish a camp and erect buildings, to construct traps or a road between one camp and another, to build a supply base at each camp, to carry packs and rations for troops, and, last but not least, to carry the wounded soldiers on stretchers from the front line to the base camps.

I have said that an order was issued to recruit one quarter of the total adult male population as laborers, carriers, policemen, and soldiers. In order to appreciate the overall problem of recruitment in Papua New Guinea, I would like to look at the details of a small community, the Binandere people, with whose history and culture I am familiar. They were a population of about 2500 adults and children, occupying twenty-one villages in the Oro province. The total adult male population was 354 of whom 21, or 6 percent, were recruited as soldiers in the Papuan Infantry Battalion. Of these, 35 men, 10 percent, joined the Royal Papuan Constabulary as policemen, and 110 men, 31 percent, were recruited as general laborers and carriers. This meant that 188 males, 53 percent, were too old or too young to render any service to the war effort. These percentages are true for about two-thirds of the people of Papua New Guinea. One-third had little contact with the war. In fact, in the highlands of New Guinea, the people rarely saw even a plane.

The exact total labor strength between 1942 and 1945 is difficult to obtain. Yet Peter Ryan (1969) provides the following figures, which increased rapidly during the Japanese occupation of Papua New Guinea. According to Ryan, by 31 October 1942 about 7000 laborers were recruited. By September 1943, 30,000 had been recruited. By July 1945, 55,000 laborers were recruited. These figures do not include many people who served short engagements near their homes. However, many populous districts were Japanese held, so that less than half the population of the controlled areas was supplying the entire levy. According to Peter Ryan's calculation,

recruitment in some villages was 100% of fit male adults. I myself knew villages where, in 1944, recruitment exceeded 100%, since partly unfit men were impressed for lighter duties. The village suffered severely without men

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to clear gardens, hunt, maintain houses and canoes, etc. Diet was deficient, disease mounted, the women were strained from overwork, there was in some places near starvation and very high infant mortality, there was all the grief of separation and bereavement and that frightening apathy and loss of will to live. (1969, 540-541)

In 1943 Peter Ryan, walking up the Lakekamu River in the Papuan Gulf, crossed the Bulldog track to Wau in the Morobe province within seven days. There he observed the carrier's conditions:

The carriers each had a load of about fifty pounds. Their daily ration was one meal of boiled rice which they cooked for themselves each night. They had each a packet of army biscuits in the mornings, usually eaten on the march, and they set out from Bulldog with a small tin of meat, a piece which they ate the first day so as not to have to carry it. Apart from his loincloth or G-string, each carrier had one 'trade' blanket [S]imple scientific measurement shows that this ration lacks protein, fats and vitamins, and even for ordinary work could be deficient in crude calories. For arduous labor in cold mountains it was quite inadequate. Sickness rates sometimes rose higher than 25%, 14% was accepted as reasonable. Beri-beri, New Guinea mouth, and tropical ulcer--all diet deficiency signs--were common. (1969, 542)

What about the soldiers? As the war progressed, police and other Papua New Guineans were taken into the army and trained as special fighting units--first, the Papuan Infantry Battalion and then the two New Guinean Infantry Battalions, which were later all joined together as the Pacific Islands Regiment (Barrett 1969). Because of their knowledge of the environment, and their skills with local terrain, this small unit achieved much and produced some distinguished war heroes, some of whom are depicted in the film *Angels of War*. In the battlefields, soldiers--Australians, Americans, and Papua New Guineans--had to face a common enemy, the Japanese Army. Abraham Pap of Wadokai said how all the soldiers faced the formidable enemy: "We saw the *masta* soldier dying and the Japanese dying, and we were very frightened. Blood was like water and we were completely soaked in it. We just laid on the ground and moved along on our stomachs. If we raised our heads, bullets would have got us in no time." Sir John Guise echoes the same sentiment of the bond between and among the soldiers who had to face the enemy at close range--on many occasions only a rifle-shot away. "The friendship was bound on the battlefield of blood. This is exactly what happened when Australians and Papua New Guineans fought together, suffered together, and no force in the world can smash the friendship" (in Nelson 1980, 172).

This quotation reflects the bond in hindsight, as there was distinct discrimination between European soldiers and Melanesians in the battlefields, and each was segregated in separate camps. For example, an anthropologist reported the following incident after the war at Madang:

Two tanks were installed near the wharf for drinking. Both full of the same chlorinated water but labelled respectively "European personnel" and "Natives only." As I pass one morning, I heard the ANGAU officer in charge of the natives wrongly abusing a private who had gone to the wrong tap. "Have you no pride or grace?" he asked. "Don't you realize that this water is for coons?" (Inglis 1969, 514)

The private may have been an innocent person who probably did not think of Papua New Guineans as coons. In spite of the segregation there were very close bonds between the soldiers of different races. Don Barrett reports of a toothless Australian being fed by a Melanesian private when a huge flood chased the soldiers up into the trees:

After an uncomfortable and wet night there was a little cheer in the morning when a small wild pig was captured. Miraculously a fire was made and soon the tempting smell of cooking pork was causing mouths to water. Watering freely was the mouth of Lieutenant Harry Read who was also bemoaning the loss in the flurry of the previous day of his denture. Pig cooked, and Read's batman, Pte. Lalun produced a tasty meal assuring Read that the pork was tender enough to eat without teeth. It was. "How was it done?" queried Read. "Simple," said Lalun, "I chewed it first." (1969, 501)

The film *Angels of War* reveals glimpses of the dramatic theater of the war, and the traumatic, emotional impact it had in Papua New Guinea. The film shows the suffering and losses, as well as the recent and continuing demands for compensation, especially by the carriers, laborers, policemen, and soldiers. It is not possible to include a narration of every man and woman interviewed in the film, but I wish to highlight a few individuals, in order to put you in a position to appreciate their statements.

The first person is Arthur Duna, whom I alluded to earlier. Duna was at Buna government station when the Japanese bombed it and describes how he and his relative escaped from the station:

As the plane came very low, it started to fire its machine gun and went ta, ta, ta, ta, ta, ta, ta, ta, like coconuts falling from the trees, and everything was totally smashed. Wilfred and I were near a house with an iron roof and we felt that the machine gun was going to destroy the roof of the house and bring the house down to the ground. So Wilfred and I hid under some planks of timber that were laid on top of one another nearby. We were

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hiding there when the plane came and fired its guns and then passed by. Then it returned and fired at the station again. I came out from under the planks first and pulled at Wilfred's legs saying, "Look, if we stay here the bombs will come and kill all of us, so let's run away." So I pulled him out and ran to the sea. Wilfred and I left all our loincloths and our waistbands, armbands, everything under the planks. We just ran naked into the sea and dived under the water. All other parts of our bodies were under the water with mouths shut, though the noses to breathe and eyes to watch the planes were in air. It was like lying in a grave, except we still breathed. Each time the plane came over, we dived under the water. And each time it went away, we came out of the sea and ran along the beach. Just ran, ran, and ran.

(Waiko 1988, 46)

In the film, Duna tells the story of how the Japanese captured him, of his escape, of his recruitment to work as a laborer for the US military forces, and of the time he was innocently beaten as a result of his fellow villagers' desire to have sexual intercourse with the white female nurses.

The second person is Raphael Oimbari from a village between Buna and Gona. He is an ordinary villager who meets a wounded soldier by the name of George Washington in a helpless situation:

George Washington received a mortal wound and I helped him to a nearby camp where a doctor treated him. After the bridge crossing, he asked for water and I fetched some for him. He had hardly finished drinking, drinking it, when a Japanese Bren gun burst out like thunder at us and we dived under the Kunai grass. George on one side and I on the other side of the track. I crawled out first and picked him up slowly. We were walking again when he said, "I am hungry." I gave him one hard biscuit, but he said, "Break it in half and let us share it." So I broke it and gave him one half and I ate the other half. After sharing the biscuit, he began to limp instead of walking. The pain was too much and he was dizzy. I embraced the man and tried to carry him but he was too heavy, so I half-carried him to our camp.

The third person is Japhet Jigede, who rose to the rank of sergeant major but was stripped of his rank just before the war ended. He explains that the war ended because Pacific Islanders used their age-old customary magical powers and not because of superior weapons, particularly the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima in August 1945. Jigede believes the ashes from the burning of a piece of bark, a leaf, a piece of animal or fish, and a portion of his father's hair saved the Melanesians under his command. He describes the process and the effective use of the magical power:

I told all the members of the Papuan Infantry Battalion under my control to sit around the fire that I made to burn these things. They had to be there

when the power in these things evaporated into smoke so that they could inhale it. After the things were burned to ashes, I filled their tins with ashes. I ordered each soldier to come one by one and take a tin of ashes and my instructions followed. "This is not our war but we have entered into it and you may die at any moment. This staff is your protection, derived from our deep rooted customs established by our ancestors who used it against their enemies. Do not play with it. If you play with girls or lie with women, do not hide these deeds." [Say], "I am sick, my head is aching and my body's heavy," or any kind of excuse that you can produce. The officers will allow you to return to the rear camps, away from the enemy front line, then you must boil some water with some traditional plant munitions and wash away the sexual odor before you can be allowed to return to the front line again. If you do not follow this, your sexual contact with women will spread from one man to the others among us. This would make us vulnerable and easy targets for the Japanese bullets which would shoot through our bodies. The bathing and cleansing in hot water with medicines will wash away the vulnerability and the enemy bullets will miss us." To avoid bullets, I ordered the men to abstain from sexual intercourse if they wanted to return to see their families in the villages. I showed them how to use the ash.

"Every morning, dip your middle finger and smear it over your eyebrow, rub it over your rifle barrel and the remainder of it, keep inside the pouches where pistols or cartridges are kept. If you follow these instructions, your bullets will enter the bodies of the enemy, but the enemy bullets will not touch you. They will miss you. This is because the power embodied in the bones of my father will protect us all. We are going to war with him and he will guide our way and save us." This power came down from my ancestors and it was passed on to me. I gave this power to soldiers under my command. We have defeated the enemy through these customs and no other. This was an overwhelming power which I never, ever, exposed to my white superiors. Not aware that our customs had provided the power to win, the final outcome of World War II, whitemen thought they had succeeded in defeating the Japanese through man and weapons alone.

Conclusion

Allow me to conclude with some remarks on historical method. Karl Popper, in his book *Objective Knowledge*, argues that the difference between metaphysical and scientific theories is that the scientific ones can, in principle, be disproved. Nobody ever proves that a theory is true, but someone can prove that a theory is false. The theory that has stood up to several attempts to disprove it is better than one that has not been tested. The real problem

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with social science is that a theory that is in principle falsifiable may be one very hard to test in practice.

This is especially true of history because it deals with surviving evidence. The European historians do not ordinarily ask what is the nature of historical explanation any more than a Melanesian sorcerer asks what is the nature of spiritual power. But both are continuing a tradition in which they are likely to receive and accept, often without questioning, somewhat vaguely formulated (even incoherent and contradictory) accounts of what history or sorcery is from those who trained them. The questions they are likely to ask are those of technique rather than of philosophical foundations. For instance, will it be useful to conduct a particular numerical analysis or will that type of sago palm produce more sago than the others?

What then is the characteristic difference between the documents and the oral traditions on which history is based? It is not, I believe, that the document is possibly true while the oral narratives are not true. The difference is, I suggest, that the written and oral sources are embedded in different cultural traditions. They are meant to be judged by quite different traditional standards in literate and oral cultures. The problem arises when literate historians try to fit oral testimony into the method, model, and time scale that accommodate history based on documentary sources. The reverse is also true in a situation where oral narrators attempt to fix the written word into the complex ethos that is history derived from oral traditions. Yet the similarities of the approaches are striking and a good historical method is equally important for both.

World War II was not of the Papua New Guineans' making and was beyond their understanding. The villagers experienced the terror of the explosive might of warplanes and battleships, of mortar and machine-gun fire. They watched as their homes and gardens were destroyed. They were conscripted by both sides and sometimes they were refugees in their own land. Ethel May Pushon, an Australian, is said to have turned 105 years in April this year (1988). She has seen two world depressions and two world wars. According to her, when World War I broke out, "Women had a degree of independence never seen before because the menfolk were away." In Papua New Guinea, the independence of women, perhaps, went a bit too far. One observer put it this way: "If the sexual problems of the boys away at war are serious, so also are those of the sweethearts and wives they leave behind. Deprived of their lawful sexual partners, the women indulged in random love affairs with the men who remained in the village."

An extreme example of this type of maladjustment came to my attention on the lower Sepik River. A group of women of a village from which almost three-fourths of the able-bodied men had been recruited appeared before the assistant district officer at Angoram to make court. They accused the *tutul* of

neglecting his duties by refusing to have intercourse with them. They argued that since the government had sanctioned the recruitment of their men, it was up to this village official appointed by the government to keep them sexually satisfied. The *tultul*, speaking in his own behalf, wailed that he had done his best but that he had reached his limit. "*Mi les long puspus*," he cried, "*baebae skin blong mi bae pinis*" 'I am tired of intercourse, soon my skin will become completely loose and I will be completely wrecked as a result of too much orgasm.'

The following is a cry from one of the women whose son was taken away. I'll translate the song poem in this manner:

War has come
The young men are leaving
To defend alien land.
The foreigners will be saved.

What has called
The young man away
To become enemy victims?
The conquerors will be happy.

The mother is deserted
Lonely without her son
A barren beggar
Abandoned to heartache.

The mother who lost blood
Has become a barren beggar.
The one who bore him
I am a lonely beggar.

(Waiko 1986, 31)

Here, this woman is telling in subtle points about the flow of war. She sees her son going to fight and laments that this will only be to the advantage of the foreigners: those who see him as a savior and those who will count him as a victim. The verses are strong statements of the grieving mother who feels deserted and impoverished. The poem is a clear indication that while the villagers knew little of the broad strategic flow of the war or the reasons that either side gave for their violence, they made perceptive statements about their own actions and attitudes.

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